Do The Hindu Shastras Prohibit Sea-voyages.

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AH INDER KARAN BAHADUR.

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Do The Hindu Shastras Prohibit Sea-voyages.

BY

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RAJAH INDER KARAN BAHADUR,
ASAF JAHI, HYDRABAD, DECCAN.

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"DO THE HINDU SHASTRAS PROHIBIT SEA-VOYAGES."

(With a special reference to the approaching Paris International Exhibition.)

It would be as easy to stem the torrent of a river as to stop the march of progress. Under the beneficent rule of Britain, India has started on the onward path of progress. English education has opened the eyes of the Indians. European scholars have devoted, some of them a life-time, to the exclusive study of Sanskrit. The beauties of that grand lane guage, of that grand people—the Aryans who spoke it, and the masterpieces of literature bearing upon every department of human action, thought and experience, that exist in that language—these have all been unearthed from the recesses of misty caverns or long forgotten

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libraries. The researches of oriental scholars have served to discover to the world the existence and excellence of Sanskrit works of a high order. Their labour of love has brought them within the reach of the ordinary reader.

In order to understand the position of Sanskrit literature to the Hindus in general, half a century ago, it will be necessary to bear in mind a few circumstances. The successive internal wars and depradations, varied by foreign invasions, had brought India to such a pass that the mass of the people had all but forgotten the existence of these works. The priestly class here and there, had small or large libraries, but the rules of caste made them look upon all Sanskrit books as sacred literature, and therefore they prevented the castes other than the Brahmanical from having access to them.

During the last fifty years, however, a strenuous revival of Sanskrit study has taken place on a very extensive scale in our ordinary

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schools, not to say anything of special schools and colleges which have been called into existence to impart instruction in Sanskrit alone. The translations, that have been published of these books by eminent scholars, have brought the substance of the originals within the reach of those who are innocent of the sacred tongue of the Aryans. There is no doubt of the fact that a long course of study is requisite to attain to a sufficient degree of efficiency to be able to read Sanskrit works in the original and to fully grasp their meaning and importance. In India under existing circumstances English is the official language, and any one who has any aspiration to Government service, or fame, or, for the matter of that, a position in any line of business, must of necessity acquire a knowledge of that tongue. Life is too short for the average human being who does not intend to become a specialist or a *savant* to use his precious moments in the acquisition of the dead language.

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These English translations have therefore brought the standard Sanskrit works within the scope of the mass of English educated Indians.

The effect of all this is that the modern reform party among the Hindus is evincing an increasing desire to find passages in their sacred texts sanctioning the many reforms that are now in contemplation. These translations from the simplicity of style and system of arrangement are invaluable for hunting up the required references.

Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunath Rao, of Madras fame, has been dinning it into the ears of social reformers and the general public that the sacred religious books of the Hindus are to be taken in a certain order, the next in the list being valueless if it in any way should contradict the one preceding. Thus, any passage of the Shastras, contradicting the Vedas, ought to be considered invalid. The principle may be very good. But the question is, how

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do the majority of the orthodox class accept it? They say that in this *Kaliyuga*, every thing should be up-side down. Special rules govern this era, and custom therefore ought to over-ride all the most sacred books!

No number of quotations of Sanskrit texts have been of any avail in convincing the orthodox Hindu of the fact that any particular custom is contrary to the Vedas. Nevertheless, the Hindu has come to contemplate with characteristic *nonchalance* many innovations. Widow Remarriage is beginning to lose all its horrors, though the opposition is yet very strong. The carrying of cooked food on the railways, adoption of English costume and manners, the free use of the *mleccha* languages (English and Hindustani) on sacred occasions, interdining among the various sects and subsects of the Brahmans, and a thousand minor breaches of customary and sacerdotal law, are all practised by the Hindus, and yet these do not render them liable to excommunication.

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And what is excommunication ? No one can realise its horrors so well as a member of the twice-born castes. The similar punishment awarded to recalcitrants by the Church of Rome, or " boycotting " among the Irish, is but child's play in comparison. Every Hindu looks suspiciously or contemptuously at an excommunicated person. Temples and all places of worship are closed to him; no priest will assist him in the performance of every-day religious observances and ceremonies; he is utterly excluded from all social and religious duties and privileges, and from the performance of all those acts and observances, the sum total of which is the be-all and end-all of Hindu life. Life thus becomes a burden to him, unless he cuts himself off from the society which has excommunicated him and turns a convert to some other religion !

However, it may not be out of place, in this connection to point out that the Hindus were once a seafaring people, and that even

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in this *Kaliyuga*, a Hindu, and for the matter of that, a Brahman does not lose his caste by a sea-voyage, or residence in foreign countries. A few quotations bearing on the antiquity of the practice of sea-voyaging among the Hindus, will no doubt be read with interest.

Layard wrote :—"The monuments of Egypt prove that she did not stand alone in civilisation and power. Sesostris invaded India when her empire was in a highly flourishing condition. In no period of their history were the Egyptians famous as nautical men. The foreign nation that taught the Chaldeans in letters and in arts, is said to have come up the Erythrean sea, and not to have been the Egyptians. If it was neither the Egyptians, nor the Arabians or Persians, then it must have been the Hindus, who should be considered as the nation that is spoken of in Chaldean tradition."

Colonel Milford wrote that according to Issia, "there were diviners and sooth-sayers

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in Syria and Palestine, from beyond the East (*i. e.*, to say, from Persia), and of course from India, 700 years before Christ, and that these long after found their way to Rome." Again—'to this day, (1811) there are certainly followers of Brahma and Brahmans in Arabia, where many old names of places are Sanskrit and Hindi."

In his "Ride through Islam" March describes his journey from Baku to Teheran in which he, whilst visiting Baku, met with a Hindu temple with a Brahman as its worshipper.

In his Notes on the First Dialogue on "The Conversion of Learned and Philosophical Brahmans" the Revd. J. Morris quotes Eusebius, who notices that "Plato was said to have been a disciple of the Brahmans, that an Indian had taught Socrates that to know things human was impossible unless he also knew things divine. It was the Indians who brought culture and civilisation to Egypt and benefitted the people to a large extent."

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The late Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra, in his "Indo-Aryans," wrote :—"that in the time of the Vedas and for some time afterwards the Hindus were familiar with ships adapted for sea-voyages, is a fact now no longer doubted. The frequent mention, in ancient Sanskrit literature, of pearls, which could not have been produced without the aid of boats that could brave the ocean wave, is of itself sufficient evidence on the subject."

The next great authority to whom we shall turn for a confirmation of these views, is the great Law giver of the Hindus—Manu, the son of Brahma. Manu, in his Institutes, nowhere expressly prohibits sea-travelling. In Chapter III, Verses 149-167, Manu characterises certain individuals, including sea-travellers, astrologers, doctors, teachers for remuneration, idol-worshippers, murderers, tradesmen, bankers, men with certain deformities and diseases, as the worst kind of Brahmans, and directs that they should not be invited to

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Sradhas and other religious rites. From this, it will be evident that the interpretation of the complete social ostracism of the sea-traveller, now put upon the passage by modern Pandits, was never meant by Manu. If this were so, doctors, teachers, bankers, tradesmen &c. could not have been welcomed as estimable members of Hindu society; and so also, men who have performed sea-voyages of from one to seven days duration, but have never performed any religious purificatory rites.

Another argument brought forward is that England is *Mlechhadesa* in as much as it lies outside the boundaries fixed by Manu as proper for an orthodox Hindu to live in, where no Hindu religious rites are performed. Were we to follow the letter of Manu's definition, we should find that Cashmere, the Punjab, Bengal, Southern India, all are comprised under *Mlechhadesa*, but, nevertheless, do the orthodox of these provinces yield the superiority to those of Northern India ?

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There is, of course, one objection which we shall consider further on, and that is, that in America, Europe &c., the orthodox Hindus have not full facilities for performing all their religious rites and ceremonies and hence prolonged residence in the said countries is incompatible with a Hindu remaining a Hindu.

We have next the authority of Fa Hian, a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, who came to India about the 5th century A. D., as to the undoubted maritime enterprise of the Hindus. Fa Hian shipped himself from Ceylon on his return journey in a great merchant vessel which carried about 200 men. On the voyage, a great tempest arose, and the ship sprang a leak and much cargo was thrown overboard. After 90 days journey, the ship reached *Ye-po-ti* (Java or Sumatra). " In this country heretics and Brahmans flourish. "

The pilgrim after some time left in another similar vessel for China. On the voyage, another storm arose, and the super-

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stitious Brahmans on board the vessel said to each other.—"It is because we have got this Sraman (Fa Hian) on board, we have no luck, and have incurred this great mischief. Come, let us land this Bhikshu on any island we may meet, and let us not all perish for the sake of one man." But this misfortune was averted by the firmness of his patron, and they reached China in safety.

From the above circumstances we learn that the Hindus were advanced pretty well in nautical matters, as is evident from the fact that merchant vessels, each carrying a crew of 200 men or more, braved the perils of the ocean deep. We further learn that Brahmans went on sea-voyages to Sumatra, Java, and even to China, and that the Brahmans had established themselves in flourishing colonies in Sumatra and Java.

Houen Thsang, who came to India about the middle of the seventh century, A. D., in describing *Charitra*, a great seaport in Orissa,

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says, "Here it is that merchants depart for distant countries, and strangers come and go and stop here on their way"; thus furnishing additional evidence on this point.

In this Kali Yuga, it is argued that Manu's *Smriti* is inapplicable, and that Parasara's Smriti has greater force. Parasara's Smriti has found an able commentator in Madhwa-Charya, and the latter's commentaries are well-known throughout India. Neither in this Smriti, nor in its learned commentary is there any ordinance as to the outcasting of sea-travellers. Of course, Parasara, following in the wake of Manu, has included a sea-traveller in the list of Brahmans unfit to be invited to religious rites. But this does not excommunicate him entirely, as the modern orthodox section would like to enforce.

The Puranas, which are also looked upon as authorities, though in a degree inferior to the Smritis, furnish the text enjoining the social ostracism of even *purified* sea-travellers.

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In the list of acts and omissions to be practised in the present age, therein given, the "association with Dwijas who have made voyages on boardship over the sea" is included :—

"Dwijasya abdhad tu nan yâtuh
Sodhitasya api sangrahah"

The words *nan yâtuh* have, however, been decided by the Poona branch of the Shri Sankaracharya *Math*, to refer only to sailors and persons living by the sea, and *not to ordinary travellers.*

Coming to the current century and events of every day occurrence and of those within the memory and experience of living men, we find ample support for our contention that Hindus can perform sea-voyages, and sojourn in foreign countries for an indefinite period of time without losing caste.

About 40 years ago, the people of Chittagong, Noakhully and Comillah districts used to go to Calcutta for business, or on pilgrimage to the holy places of the North-

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Western Provinces, by circuitous routes across the jungly tracts of Bakergunje and Sunderbands, the journey occupying 20 to 22 days. The Brahman youths of these districts also used to travel by these circuitous routes to proceed to Nuddea for Sanskrit education. But when the B. R. S. N. Co. opened out their river steam service, these Brahmans and other Hindus, availed themselves of this method of travelling, it being held by the Nuddea Pandits that such a course was not prohibited, especially in the case of the *Vidyarthi* or seeker after knowledge.

Daily increasing numbers of Hindus, and Brahmans among them, travel every year, by the coasting steamers between Madras, Orissa, Bombay, Cochin, Calcutta, Rangoon, &c. They never perform any penances after their sea-voyage, and never lose caste, though such journeys occupy from one to seven days.

There are Marvari merchants in Hongkong, Yokohama, and even in New York.

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There are, it appears, twenty Brahman families "who perform the coronation ceremony of the King of Siam, prepare the calendar, and serve His Majesty as court astrologers."

Speaking of Sir Jung Bahadur's voyage to Europe, a Calcutta paper thus remarks:— "that great man was a most orthodox Hindu and one entirely innocent of the English language." And yet he ventured to undertake the voyage, and under circumstances much more difficult than can possibly be found now. His party was composed of seven hundred men, including many Brahmans, who while out on the voyage, duly followed their religious usages, and recited the *Gita*, before touching food. The party had cows and Ganges water and fruits (including cocoanuts) and preserves, but neither meals were cooked during the voyage, nor consumed by any of them. What Sir Jung Bahadur could do then, we could do more easily now. The duration of the voyage has been considerably shortened

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and the hardships to the orthodox Hindu voyager would at the present time be next to nothing.

Only recently, we read of a movement among the Hindu inhabitants of Natal, emigrants from India, for the construction of a Hindu temple to serve as their every day place of worship.

Hindu coolies have, during the last few years, been emigrating in larger and larger numbers to distant parts such as South Africa, Australia, the Straits Settlements &c. When they return, they are received back into Hindu society, without any kind of penance at all.

Do not parties of Hindu gentlemen proceed from Madras to Calcutta, and back on board a steamer, to attend the National Congress meetings? Have they lost caste? And, are there not numerous instances of England returned Hindu gentlemen who are admitted within the pale of Hindu society, after the necessary purification?

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Having brought the subject of the controversy to its present stage, and after having shown the signs of the times, we may proceed to consider the only real and reasonable objections that orthodox Hindus may put forward against the practice of sea-voyaging and residence in foreign countries. The difficulties attendant thereon, are principally two. They are :—

(1) Eating on board the ship during the voyage ; and

(2) Keeping up of Hindu customs, and performing religious ceremonies &c., when in a foreign land.

A little reflection will prove that neither of these difficulties is insurmountable. We shall consider the first difficulty. In India, Hindus perform coasting voyages of one to seven days' duration, and yet manage to keep themselves alive without partaking of forbidden food. The length of the continuous sea-voyage, whether from Bombay to Aden, Aden to Port Said, or from the latter port to

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Brindisi, is never more than of seven days' duration. Even the most orthodox Hindu therefore can easily manage the journey without suffering any great hardships.

But it must not be forgotten, that there is a daily increasing class of people, who though undoubtedly within the pale of Hindu society, and generally looked upon as such, may be styled "partly Europeanised." Many of their acts, an orthodox Hindu would himself never perform. But, all the same, by such performances, the civilised Hindu does not cease to be a Hindu. This civilised class is English educated, and constitutes the party of Reform. The orthodox Brahman eyes the members of this class askance, but puts down any idiosyncracies of this class, such as wearing European costume, eating cooked food on railways &c., as inevitable to the altered circumstances of Hindu society.

The majority of the Hindus desiring to go to England and other foreign countries, be-

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longs to this civilised class. Even in a railway journey, a member of this class travels with greater convenience and comfort than one of the orthodox party. Similarly if Hindus were to take largely to sea-voyages, the members of the civilised section would find it easier.

As regards the second point, it is easy to keep up Hindu manners and customs, for in India itself, numerous innovations in point of dress &c., are not looked upon as denationalising a Hindu. Residence in a foreign country does not necessarily imply interdining, or the partaking of forbidden food or drink. There are numerous vegetarians and teetotallers in England, for instance: and their existence conclusively disproves the somewhat hazy idea prevalent among the mass of Indians that eating animal food and drinking spirituous liquors are essential to withstand the extreme coldness of the climate.

Again, when Hindus begin to proceed to England and other foreign countries in large

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numbers, nothing is so probable as that Hindu hotels will spring up in those countries and thus obviate the difficulty.

A more complicated question, however, is that regarding the performance of Hindu rites and ceremonies in a foreign land, in the absence of Brahman priests. This would only be an initial difficulty; for, if Hindus begin to inhabit foreign countries, and the fact comes to the knowledge of the priestly class that a *Purohit* is wanted in England, who can earn a decent living, it will not be long before members of that profession will be in open competition to supply that want.

In this connection, it may fairly be asked, are there not many Hindus, and even Brahmans, in India, who from the year's commencement to the year's end perform not a single religious rite or ceremony? Are they in consequence excommunicated?

By no means. The elastic Hindu religion prescribes that religious ceremonies may

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be performed by proxy. This method can be adopted. Penance or *Prayaschittam* is also prescribed for such omissions in performance. This, with a dip in the sacred Ganges, ought to satisfy all parties. In short, this objection is simply stupid because it argues a sudden solicitude for the performance of the so-called religious rites, which in India, everybody forgets to notice, but the remembrance of which rushes with unheard-of force, the moment one signifies his intention of leaving India.

This is very much to be regretted. The Hindus are superior to all nations in the world, inasmuch as they possess a system of religious philosophy, perfected long ages ago, when the rest of the world was sunk in ignorance. If the modern Hindus, who stick to the letter of their religion, and those others who scoff at them, were to approach their religious tenets with reverence, and study them with earnestness and conform to them in the full and original spirit thereof, there can be no doubt that

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the unmeaning opposition to the movement, which is now encountered on all hands would entirely cease, while the danger of losing caste would also be considerably minimised.

Thus far we have considered the religious and the popular sides of the question. It is hoped that it has been made clear that the difficulties alleged to beset sea-voyages are more imaginary than real. We do not forget, however, even for a moment, that these arguments are simply thrown away, if notwithstanding them the mass of the Hindus refuse to recognise their force or to associate with the purified sea-traveller. Here it is enough to state that matters will, in the long run, right themselves. As education advances and the civilising influences of the West leaven the Hindu mind, the priestly classes who are, and have been in every age, the sole obstructors of reform and progress, are finding out, rather to their own cost, that the hold upon the public mind which their forefathers used to pos-

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sess is fast loosening. The times have undergone a marvellous change; in fact, they are still changing. The more sensible among the Brahmans have thrown their lot along with that of the party of Reform. A few more, and the priestly opposition will have greatly diminished, if not entirely ceased.

No movement for the amelioration of mankind ever emanated from, or received in its earlier stages, the support of the established church of the country. This stage appears to have been happily past in India, in connection with the sea-voyage question, for, even the priests are turning round. At a meeting, in Calcutta, held to discuss this question, many learned Pundits, including the eminent Principal of the Sanskrit College, Mahamahopadhyaya Mohesh Chandra Nyayaratna C. I. E., expressed themselves unmistakably in favour of it. The Principal, who is a specialist, said that there is nothing in the Shastras to prohibit sea-voyages or residence

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in foreign countries, provided, Hindu usages were conformed to.

The following illustration of an anomaly will be read with interest :—" Suppose a man had two sons; and one of them went to England and passed the Indian Civil Service Examination, and the other was convicted of some grievous offence, and was transported to the Andaman Islands. The Civilian, when he returned home after having done honour to his family and his country, would be excommunicated and outcasted from the pale of Hindu society; but, the thief or murderer who had disgraced himself and his family, when he returned home, lo! and behold! he would be welcomed back to the bosom of Hindu society!"

Brahmans of upper India, in the army, when they return from Foreign service, perform " Satyanarain Katha " and are thereby purified. They, thereafter, mix freely in society.

According to the Hindu Shastras, the life of a member of the twice-born caste is divided

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into four periods, the first of which is called "Brahmacharya," during which his sole duty is the acquisition of knowledge. He is enjoined to suffer even the greatest hardships in the attainment of this object. England is the centre of education, and it is his duty therefore to travel there for instruction. Moreover, travelling and residence in foreign countries for the sake of knowledge is enjoined in our religious books.

Looking at the question, next, from the utilitarian point of view, we find that it is essential for the bettering of the interests of India and its millions of inhabitants. For, by an inscrutable dispensation of Providence, Europe has become the home of worldly prosperity, and India's interests are indissolubly bound to her.

It is an undoubted fact that among the nations of the world, the English are, at the present day, the most commercial and enterprising people. They are in the foremost ranks

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of the world in enlightenment and material prosperity. We have the rare good fortune of being ruled by them and of being thus intimately connected with them. The hearty desire of our rulers, unlike that of many other nations of conquerors, is to see the regeneration of the wreck of a once grand nation. No one will feel more gratified than the English, should we follow in their footsteps and raise ourselves materially and intellectually. We have their example before us and it is our bounden duty to emulate them in our march for worldly prosperity. Everywhere around us, we every day hear complaints of the growing poverty of India. What have we done to help ourselves ? Is it not our duty to bear that golden maxim in mind—a maxim that has been successfully remembered by every nation before us that has succeeded in raising itself—viz., " God helps those that help themselves. " This is true in small as well as in great things. We ought therefore to

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put our shoulder to the wheel, and casting all idle and superstitious fears to the winds proceed manfully onward to the coveted goal of material prosperity. We should find out and pursue with unflinching perseverance the path that alone can crown our efforts with undreamt-of success. We should follow in the wake of the British Nation, and divert more of our energies into the channels of commercial and industrial enterprise.

Turning to the existing state of circumstances, what find we? All the great enterprises for the opening up of the resources of the country now require imported foreign capital and foreign trained labour; the manufactures and industries require a further import of similar materials; and so does every technical department and every profession. The Indian Civil Service Competitive Examination held in England, is open to every Indian. What is it that now prevents the most promising and intelligent Indians from com-

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peting with their English brethren on an equal footing ? Apart from the Civil Service, English training and residence in England better fit a man for the discharge of official duties under the Government of India, than an Indian training alone.

It is only by education in England that our young men will be able to take part in social and political matters on a footing of equality with the English. In the Department of Commerce also, our merchant princes will then be able to open out their branches and carry on trade in foreign countries. Thus, the wealth of India can be increased in numerous ways, if Indians only begin to go to England in larger numbers and try to enter every profession, or chalk out new lines in India in the shape of new manufactures, arts, industries, &c.

One word more and we shall have done. Apart from the necessity of living in European capitals for purposes of acquiring know-

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ledge, there is a great commercial field open just now for Indian enterprise. A visit to the coming Paris International Exhibition cannot but be of intense advantage to the Hindu merchant. Exhibits, and plenty of them, will no doubt be sent from India. But this is not all. The presence of a few leading members of the Hindu community interested in raising the status of their brethren will be of the greatest practical utility. They will there see with their own eyes the products of the whole civilised world and can learn lessons of far-reaching consequences, which, if they will set about in right earnest to lay to heart, will help them in the near future to restore India to its old position of wealth and importance among the nations of the world.

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